



MEDIA RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
December 15, 2004**

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PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

WEAPONS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING ARRESTS

CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE: United States Attorney Tom Colantuono, New Hampshire Attorney General Kelly Ayotte, United States Drug Enforcement Administration Resident Agent In Charge Leo Ducey, Resident Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Clifford Ellston, and Farmington, NH Police Chief Scott Roberge announce the arrest of two individuals in connection with an alleged large scale marijuana distribution enterprise in the New Hampshire Seacoast and Southern Maine area.

On November 16, 2004, agents arrested Michael Croteau, age 50, of Rye, New Hampshire, was taken into custody following a traffic stop on Route 16 North in Dover, New Hampshire. As a result of the stop, Croteau was charged by state authorities with possession with intent to distribute in excess of five (5) pounds of marijuana. Subsequent investigation yielded the seizure by the New Hampshire Drug Task Force and DEA of approximately eighty (80) pounds of marijuana and several firearms, including two (2) semi-automatic assault weapons. Subsequently, Croteau was charged by complaint in U.S. District Court in Concord, New Hampshire, with possession with intent to distribute marijuana and federal weapons offenses. Given the nature of the weapons involved, federal law provides for a ten (10) year minimum mandatory federal sentence, to be imposed consecutively to any other term of imprisonment.

Approximately two (2) weeks after Croteau's arrest, the Farmington Police Department developed information leading to the seizure of approximately four hundred (400) pounds of marijuana in the Town of Farmington. After further investigation by the Farmington Police, the Drug Task Force and DEA were notified of the seizure. Agents from the Drug Task Force and the DEA conducted further investigation which led to the arrest of Robert Vennard, age 55, of Berwick, Maine, on a state charge of conspiracy to distribute in excess of five (5) pounds of marijuana.

The federal charges against Croteau will be prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office by Assistant United States Attorney Mark E. Howard. The United States Attorney's Office is reviewing the case against Robert Vennard in order to determine whether federal charges will be sought.

Croteau and Vennard are currently being held in lieu of bail.

A complaint is only an allegation and not proof of criminal conduct. As in all cases, each defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.